

WHY IS RAJAS UPASTAMBHAKA- IN THE SĀMĀKHYAKĀRIKĀ?

When, in the description of *guṇas* in *Sāmkhyakārikā* (12-)13, the word *upastambhaka-* is used with reference to *rajas*, we are faced with an exegetical problem, which already troubled the ancient commentators.

Gauḍapāda's explanation:

upastabhnātītyupastambhakamuḍḍyotakaṁ yathā vṛṣo vṛṣadarśane utkaṭamupastambhaṁ karoti eva rajovṛttih

needs an explanation in its turn: it is very curious that a word as rare as *upastambhaka-*¹ is glossed here with a ἀπαξ λεγόμενον (*uddyotaka-*)². Which is also the sense of « making an *upastambha-* »? And as to the coherence of the whole? Following Wilson³, the PW attaches the meaning of « anfeuern, aufregend » to *uddyotaka-* in this passage⁴; but such a meaning would be isolated, as it results from the PW and pw themselves, in the word-family to which *uddyotaka-* belongs: we can find only « aufleuchten, erglänzen » for *uddyotate*⁵, « das Aufleuchten, Hellwerden, Erglänzen; aufstrahlendes Licht » for the substantive *uddyota-*⁶.

1. Cf. its occurrences *infra*, pp. 234-35. Cf. also the following n.

2. According to O. BÖHLINGK, R. ROTH, *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, 7 vols., St. Petersburg, 1855-75 (abbreviation: PW); O. BÖHLINGK, *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch in kürzerer Fassung*, 7 parts, St. Petersburg, 1879-89 (abbreviation: pw), and the other lexicons, glossaries, indexes of words in my hands.

3. In H. T. COLEBROOKE, H. H. WILSON (trans.), *The Sāmkhya Kārikā or Memorial verses on Sāmkhya philosophy*, by Iśvara Krishna, trans. from the Sanscrit by H. T. Colebrooke. Also *The Bhāṣya or Commentary of Gaurapāda*, trans. and illustrated by an original comment by H. H. Wilson, Oxford, 1837: « exciting ».

4. M. MONIER-WILLIAMS, *A Sanskrit-English dictionary*, Oxford, 1899², s.v.: « inflaming, stimulating » (besides « enlightening, emblazoning »).

5. MONIER-WILLIAMS, *Dict. cit.*, s.v.: « to blaze up, shine, shine forth ».

6. *Id.*, *ib.*, s.v.: « the act of flashing up, becoming bright or visible; light, lustre ».

The matter becomes even more complicated when we compare Gauḍapāda with Paramārtha's Chinese commentary. On the one hand the passage of Gauḍapāda could mean, according to Wilson:

« what urges, urgent, exciting: as a bull, upon seeing another bull, exhibits vehement excitement; that is the effect of foulness »⁷,

on the other hand the corresponding passage in Paramārtha is translated by Takakusu in the following manner:

« "tenir" [i.e., *upastabhnāti*] signifie avoir l'esprit excité sans tenir compte des autres; ainsi un éléphant en fureur, désirant se battre, engage la lutte à la vue d'un éléphant ennemi. Quand le rajas prédomine, l'homme cherche la lutte, car son esprit est constamment agité et il ne peut se tenir tranquille »⁸.

The simile is very much alike in the two commentators; which would confirm Keith's hypothesis that Gauḍapāda and Paramārtha — and Māthara — may have had a common source which is no longer accessible⁹. But Gauḍapāda and Paramārtha seem to have exploited the simile in a quite opposite way, as far as one may infer from the explicit clause, added by Paramārtha, « avoir l'esprit excité sans tenir compte des autres ». To be sure, his elephant which excites itself upon seeing another elephant is a very unsuitable example for such a psychological condition.

The rendering « urgent » used by Colebrooke for *upastambhakam*¹⁰, has been very successful: it has been handed down to lexicographers¹¹, accepted by Deussen¹² and many other translators¹³, given credit to by monographs about *Sāṃkhya* and histories of Indian philosophy¹⁴. We have here an interpretation which was already circulating in Indian tradition, cf. e.g. *prerakatvam* in the passage of the *Sāṃkhyacandrikā* quoted by Wilson¹⁵. Yet, Wilson himself pointed out that such an explanation of *upastambhakam* as « stimulating, impelling » is quite

7. Cf. also C. PENZA (trans.), *Īśvarakṛṣṇa, Le strofe del Sāṃkhya (Sāṃkhyakārikā) con il commento di Gauḍapāda*, Torino, 1978 (1^a ed. 1960), ad lc.

8. J. TAKAKUSU, *La Sāṃkhyakārikā étudiée à la lumière de sa version chinoise*, in BEFEO, 4 (1904), p. 997.

9. A. B. KEITH, *The Sāṃkhya System*, Calcutta-London, 1918¹; Calcutta, 1949², quoted by M. HULIN, *Sāṃkhya literature (A history of Indian literature, ed. by J. GONDA, vol. VI, fasc. 3)*, Wiesbaden, 1978, p. 140.

10. COLEBROOKE-WILSON, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

11. PW; pw; MONIER-WILLIAMS, *Dict. cit.*

12. P. DEUSSEN, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. I, part 3: *Die nach-vedische Philosophie der Inder*, Leipzig, 1908, p. 427: « antreibend ».

13. E.g. ANNE-MARIE ESNOUL in A.-M. ESNOUL (ed.), *L'hindouisme*, Paris, 1972, p. 361 (« excitant »); PENZA, *op. cit.*, p. 51 (« stimulante »).

14. E.g. R. GARBE, *Die Sāṃkhya-Philosophie*, Leipzig, 1894, p. 213 (« ... Anregung... »); GIUSEPPINA SCALABRINO BORSANI, *La filosofia indiana*, Milano, 1976, p. 129 (« stimulante »).

15. In COLEBROOKE-WILSON, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

« contrary to its usual sense of "opposing, hindering" »¹⁶; in fact, we are surprised to find the above-mentioned meaning in a word-family where the concept of « setting up, propping, staying » is expressed consistently. Wilson thought to find some way out of the problem by suggesting the possibility of two homophonous roots; but the two entries in *Dhātupāṭha* X, 26 and XXXI, 7 do not point to two different verbs¹⁷. In this way, with the word *upastambhaka-* in the SK we have a good example of the handing down of an interpretation, which arose out of a mistake and which is no longer checked by successive interpreters.

Curiously enough, the *Śabdakalpadrūma* glosses *upastambhakaḥ* (substantivally!?) with *ādhikyam* « excess, superabundance ». This fact reminds us of *utkaṣṭamupastambham* in *Gauḍapāda*, but in the quotation from the *Bauddhādhikāracintāmaṇi*, which the *Śabdak.* does not give completely:

uccaiḥśravādīn tejobhāgopastambhakatayā pratyakṣayogyatvāt,

upastambhaka(tā)- does not seem to exceed the limits of the concept of « sustaining », metaphorically employed as elsewhere, particularly in medical terminology: one may compare e.g. *Caraka* IV, 6 or I, 11, where food, sleep, and government of passions are called *upastambha-* as « supports of life ».

Two occurrences of *upastambha-* in the *Hitopadeśa* (p. 29, 1.19 and p. 104, 1.6 in Schlegel and Lassen's edition¹⁸ belong to the same metaphorical sphere too: according to these two passages, closely connected — besides *upastambha-*, e.g., the compound *svalpabala-* occurs in both —, the riches or, respectively, the vulture's advice are the support (*upastambha-*) of the strenght of someone, who otherwise would be *svalpabala-* « of very little strength ». The PW gives « Stütze, Anregung », where the addition of « Anregung » is clearly intended to sustain the parallel interpretation of *upastambhaka-* as « stützend, fördernd, anregend »: but in the exegesis, one must be careful not to transfer onto the level of meaning what is only another possibility in translating a metaphor.

The third — and, to my knowledge¹⁹, last — occurrence of *upastambhaka-* is of particular interest, not only because it is given in a philosophical text — belonging to another *darśana* than the *Sāṅkhya* —, but because it is employed in a simile where a real propping is clearly involved. In Śaṅkara's commentary to *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* (p. 331 in Röer's edition) the question is of two man's « interior breaths » (*antahprāṇa-*), of which the former is *upastambhaka-* like the carrying

16. *Ib.* For the other occurrences of *upastambhaka-* cf. *infra*.

17. Cf. e.g. MONIER-WILLIAMS, *Dict. cit.*, s.v. *stambh*.

18. A. W. VON SCHLEGEL, C. LASSEN (ed.), *Hitopadesas id est Institutio salutaris. Textum... recensuerunt interpretationem latinam [not published] et annotationes criticas adiecerunt A. G. a Schlegel et C. Lassen, pars I Textum Sanscritum tenens*, Bonnæ ad Rhenum, 1829.

19. Cf. n. 2.

structures in a house, the latter on the contrary can be removed like the clay or straw from which a house is also built. It can be noticed that *upastambhaka*- falls here within a twofold, not threefold partition; in this way what is *upastambhaka*- is also, e.g., *prakāśaka*-.

At this point, however, we are faced by another problem: if we translate *upastambhaka*- with « sustaining » also in the SK (« erhaltend » Garbe²⁰; « stützend » Frauwallner²¹; « le *rajas* (a pour caractéristique) de tenir » Paramārtha according to Takakusu²², then we no longer know how to reconcile such an attribute to *rajas*, i.e. the term to which it belongs. In classical Sanskrit *rajas*- signifies « dust, dirt » — even though Sāṃkhya philosophers reinterpreted it as *rāga*- « passion »; but in both cases, how on earth could it « sustain », « erhalten » something? That is exactly the problem, which has led most scholars, from Colebrooke onwards, to renderings which however do not agree with its meaning.

We can get out of this *impasse* if we remind ourselves of É. Senart's hypothesis about the cosmological origin of *guṇas*²³. As far as the second *guṇa*- is particularly concerned, it would be to be identified, from this historical point of view, with the Vedic *rājas*-, in the meaning of « atmosphere ».

To be sure, Senart was operating with such a *rājas*- that gives us a strange impression from the semantic point of view: with the concept of « atmosphere » he also combined the concept of « dust » — which, in Senart's wording, « tourbillonne » in the atmosphere — and likewise the concept of « vapour », which in the atmosphere makes the clouds. No doubt, this opinion was very widespread in his time²⁴, but more recently Burrow has pointed out the inadequacy of its methodological grounds²⁵: according to his conclusions, which have been welcomed in scholastic circles²⁶, there are in Old Indian two homophonous *rajas*-, of which the former, chiefly classic, signifies « dust, dirt », and the latter, ṛgvedic and atharvavedic, signifies « space », and only secondarily, as Burrow stresses, « intermediate space, atmosphere ». Burrow also assumed — without apparently knowing of Senart's article — that the

20. R. GARBE (trans.), *Sāṃkhya-pravacana-bhāṣya, Vijñānabhikṣu Commentar zu den Sāṃkhyasūtras* (« Abh. für die Kunde des Morgenlandes » IX, 3), Leipzig, 1889, p. 146; subsequently, however, Garbe seems to change his mind, cf. n. 14.

21. E. FRAUWALLNER, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, vol. I, Salzburg, 1953, p. 351.

22. TAKAKUSU, *art. cit.*, p. 996.

23. É. SENART, *Rajas et la théorie indienne des trois guṇas*, in JA, 11th ser., 6 (1915), pp. 151-64.

24. Cf., e.g., A. A. MACDONELL, *Vedic Mythology*, Strassburg, 1897, p. 10 (quoted by Senart itself).

25. T. BURROW, *Sanskrit rājas*, in BSOAS, 12 (1948), pp. 645-51.

26. Cf. R. LAZZERONI, *Cultura vedica e cultura indoeuropea: sscr. rajas- gr. ἔρως*, in « Studi e Saggi Linguistici », 16 (1976), p. 143. He shows here the possibility of retaining the traditional etymological comparison with Gr. ἔρως also within the new semantic framework outlined by Burrow. Cf. also VAN BUITENEN's article quoted in the following n.

second *guṇa* of the *Sāṃkhya* might have derived its name from *rajas*- «dust, dirt», developed in «a secondary and figurative meaning» of «moral defilement»; new arguments, however, to strengthen the validity of Senart's hypothesis on this point, have been brought forward by van Buitenen in his admirable article on *sattva*²⁷: we only mention his interesting discovery that the meaning of «space» is not restricted within the limits of *Saṃhitās*' literature, but there is evidence of it even in later times, in the *Upaniṣads* and further on in the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, if we start from the meaning of Ved. *rājas-* as Burrow has defined it, we may find further evidence for Senart's hypothesis in the SK text itself.

Surely, Burrow's main concern was not to explain the semantic change from «space» to «atmosphere»; but such a change is not obvious, and on the other hand it is hardly sufficient to talk about the latter sense as a case of «a secondary and specialized» one. We have to refer, in my opinion, to the Vedic myth of creation. There atmosphere releases heaven and earth from the primeval obstruction (*ārinhas-*) by interposing between them two: it is space that creates space. So, exactly because atmosphere is space *κατ' ἐξοχήν* *rājas-* may designate it.

The answer to the question about the semantic history of Ved. *rājas-*, which Burrow left unresolved, seems to us also to be not without importance in the history of the second *guṇa*: as far as atmosphere fulfils the above-mentioned functions, i.e. atmosphere is *rājas-*, all deeds of the gods who mean to keep heaven and earth apart, to sustain, prop them, take place there. *stabhnōti* is a characteristic verb to indicate this propping in the RV²⁸; we find it in composition with *ūpa* too — and with *dyām* as its direct object e.g. in IV, 6, 1; VI, 17, 7.

If we understand *upastambhaka-* in the SK in this sense too²⁹, we may observe unexpected consistencies in the context: so *rajas* is also

27. J. A. B. VAN BUITENEN, *Studies in Sāṃkhya (III). Sattva*, in JAOS, 77, 2 (April-June 1957), pp. 88-107.

28. Cf. B. L. OGIBENIN, *Structure d'un mythe védique. Le mythe cosmogonique dans le Rgveda*, trans. from the Russian by CATHERINE BRODSKY-CAMPBELL, The Hague - Paris, 1973 (original ed. 1968), pp. 74-85 and pass.

29. According to VAN BUITENEN, *art. cit.*, p. 103, «in *rajas* we have a clear case where a macrocosmic entity loses its macrocosmic content almost entirely»; but, when does that happen? If we read the text of the SK free from the conditionings of Indian exegetical tradition, we may find there the best evidence for the atmospheric character of *rajas*: as a matter of fact in the *kā.* 54 what in the universe is dominated by *rajas*, not only lies *madhye* «in the middle» between the two other parts of the universe dominated by *sattva* and *tamas*, which are respectively *ūrdhva* «above» and *mūlataḥ* «at the root, down» (cf. further *Bhagavadgītā* XIV, 18 = MBh, *Bhīṣmap.* XXXVI, 18); it is also clearly defined, by means of the compound *brahmādistambaparyantam*, as extending from the earth's surface — the grass is the symbol of this superficial level — to heaven, that is the abode of the god *Brahmā* (on this point SENART, *art. cit.*, p. 159, is still too conditioned by Colebrooke, and consequently by Indian exegetical tradition). We may notice the interesting internal allusion, which the phonic resemblance between *stamba-* «blade of grass, etc.» here and *upastambhaka-* in 13 gives rise to.

pravṛtti...artha- (kā.12)³⁰, because the setting in motion of the beings starts at the very moment when the world (*jāgat-*, morphologically « the going on one ») has been released from narrowness/distress (*ānhas-*), i.e. space has been created by setting up the most appropriate props to this aim.

In Vedic myth, moreover, the creating power of the gods, that is, as I was saying just now, the opening, keeping apart, propping one, has to overcome the power of resistance (*vr̥trá-*) which is of the evil spirits dwelling in the domain of darkness (*tāmas-*), primeval chaos / hell. It is not then mere chance, when in the SK the third *guṇa*, viz. *tamas*, is defined not only as *niyamārtha-* (kā.12) « adapted to ... restraint » but also as *varaṇakam* (kā.13) « enveloping »³¹, a primary derivative from the same root as *vr̥trá-*.

Undoubtedly, van Buitenen is right in affirming that « *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are really disparate terms »³², in the sense that not all three, probably, have belonged from the beginning to any triadic pattern. *rajas* is sure to have belonged there, but *rajas* « intermediate space » is a part of a triad only when opposed on the one hand to heaven, on the other hand to earth; nor may one further maintain the identification formerly proposed by Senart *tamas* = earth, for which texts do not give evidence at all.

Notwithstanding, difficulties in « showing the cosmic origin of *tamas* » do not follow necessarily from the awkwardness of Senart's identification, as it seemed to van Buitenen³³: on the contrary, we were observing that there are rather clear indications, in the text itself of the SK, to derive the third *guṇa* exactly from the « primeval night of nothingness from which creation appears »³⁴.

The above-mentioned relationship between attributes of *rajas* and attributes of *tamas* in the SK, if it also belongs on the cosmogonic level, is sure to belong there from another standpoint than the opposition *rājas-* : *dyāvāpṛthivī*³⁵; but this fact itself may account for some replace-

30. « adapted to activity » COLEBROOKE in COLEBROOKE-WILSON, *op. cit.*, p. 49. *pravartate* is used in the SK (cf. kā. 16) to designate the motion of *prakṛti* — the *πρωτεύδς* inherent to things.

31. COLEBROOKE in COLEBROOKE-WILSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 54; 49.

32. VAN BUITENEN, *art. cit.*, p. 94.

33. *Ib.*

34. These are van Buitenen's words, *ib.* The passage of *Maitrāyaṇīyopaniṣad* V, 2, therefore, may be again envisaged in another light, cf. SENART, *art. cit.*, p. 160.

35. In this context, we are reminded of the uncertainty of ṛgvedic mythographers about the hell's place in cosmography, i.e. their difficulty in putting together different schemes of description, cf. R. N. DANDEKAR, *Universe in Vedic Thought*, in *India Maior. Congratulatory Volume Presented to J. Gonda*, ed. by J. ENSINK, P. GAEFFKE, Leiden, 1972, p. 113.

ment of members of the original triad. According to van Buitenen, not only did *rajas* hold itself still, but it « brought the triadic pattern along »³⁶ too: his historical hypothesis is now all but confirmed, when the exegesis of *upastambhaka-* has indicated the intermediary functions, hence triadic $\alpha\alpha\tau'$ ἐξοχῆν of *rajas*³⁷.

36. Cf. VAN BUITENEN, *art. cit.*, p. 106.

37. On this point OGIBENIN (*op. cit.*, pp. 74; 52 f.; 33) is of particular importance.